

VZCZCXRO0999

RR RUEHBZ RUEH DU RUEHGI RUEHJO RUEHMA RUEHMR RUEHPA RUEHRN RUEHTRO
DE RUEHYD #0111/01 0331559
ZNR UUUUU ZZH
R 021559Z FEB 09
FM AMEMBASSY YAOUNDE
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC 9657
INFO RUEHZO/AFRICAN UNION COLLECTIVE
RHMFISS/HQ USAFRICOM STUTTGART GE

UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 03 YAOUNDE 000111

SENSITIVE
SIPDIS

DEPT FOR AF/C AND DRL
LONDON FOR PETER LORD
PARIS FOR ROBERTO KANEDA AND GREGORY D'ELIA

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [PINR](#) [PREL](#) [EAID](#) [CM](#)

SUBJECT: CAMEROON: USG SENDS MESSAGE ON ELECTION AGENCY

REF: A. 08 YAOUNDE 1257

[B](#). YAOUNDE 0024

[C](#). YAOUNDE 0087

[D](#). YAOUNDE 0097

[1](#). (SBU) SUMMARY: The Ambassador's decision not to attend the public swearing-in of the controversial leadership of Cameroon's elections agency (ELECAM) has caught the attention of the press, civil society, and the Government of Cameroon (GRC). The Ambassador had briefed the Prime Minister and coordinated with other donors (reftels). In response to journalists, questions, Embassy spokesman explained the USG's views on ELECAM. The public reaction--in independent newspapers and on radio call-in shows--has been largely positive. The Chiefs of Mission from the European Commission, the UK and Canada also stayed away from the event, but the European Union's own statement on ELECAM has been delayed by French refusal to sign on to the tough language advocated by other EU partners. END SUMMARY.

A SHOTGUN CEREMONY?

[2](#). (U) The Chief Justice of the Supreme Court swore in the twelve ELECAM nominees in a January 29 ceremony that illustrated the GRC's desire to minimize the controversy over Biya's choice of ruling party stalwarts. Scores of cabinet officials and senior government leaders were in attendance, and the GRC-owned Cameroon Tribune heralded the event with a one-word headline: "Irreversible." The leading opposition party, the Social Democratic Front (SDF), boycotted the ceremony, protesting the lack of impartiality among its members. Two prominent opposition leaders did attend: Adamou Ndam Njoya, President of the Cameroon Democratic Union party, and Jean-Jacques Ekindi, Coordinator for the Progressive Movement party.

ACTIONS SPEAK LOUDER THAN WORDS

[3](#). (U) As reported ref C, Ambassador called on the PM on January 27 to explain that the USG's reservations about ELECAM made it impossible for her to attend the ceremony. She said the USG would make no public statement, but would respond to press questions, if asked. At an unrelated event on the evening of the ELECAM installation, PDoff deployed Post's talking points in response to questions from journalists (see para 8 for Post's talking points.)

BROAD PUBLIC SUPPORT
FOR USG POSITION

14. (U) A number of independent daily newspapers carried the Ambassador's absence at the swearing-in as headline news in their January 30 editions, and independent daily Le Jour printed PDoff's responses in full, under the headline: "We Are Disappointed in ELECAM." The popular weekend call-in radio shows, dealt extensively with the Ambassador's absence and the USG responses, with a minority, mostly members of the Biya,s own Cameroon People,s Democratic Movement (CPDM) party, arguing that the USG had no right commenting on a domestic issue like ELECAM. The vast majority of independent participants and callers saluted the Ambassador,s decision not to lend credibility to ELECAM by attending the ceremony and expressed hope that other foreign missions would follow suit.

DISCORD WITHIN THE EUROPEAN UNION

15. (SBU) As a result of the Ambassador,s efforts to forge a consensus among Western missions, the British, Dutch, Canadian and EU COMs also decided to not attend the ceremony. Despite having told the Ambassador and EU colleagues that he would avoid the event, the French Ambassador attended the ceremony. EU Missions agreed to a draft public statement expressing the EU,s disappointment with ELECAM, but Embassy contacts in the EU report that the French Embassy has repeatedly sought to neuter or scuttle the statement.

THE COMMONWEALTH SHOWS UP
BUT STAYS SILENT

YAOUNDE 00000111 002 OF 003

16. (SBU) Stephen Omollo, Head of the Good Offices Section of the Commonwealth,s Political Affairs Division, led a technical team to Cameroon during the week of January 26. Omollo confided to the Ambassador that the Commonwealth Secretariat shares the prevailing view of ELECAM,s leadership as fatally not credible, but confessed the Commonwealth is still struggling to determine the road forward. Saying that Zimbabwe had taught the Commonwealth the dangers of disengagement, Omollo said he expected the Commonwealth would refer Cameroon to the Member,s Committee for review sometime in March and that a public statement might be issued in February. Despite Omollo,s private assurances that the Commonwealth was unimpressed with ELECAM, the GRC-owned media outlets covered the Commonwealth,s visit, and their lack of a public statement, as evidence of the Commonwealth,s "support" for ELECAM.

COMMENT: LOOKING BEYOND ELECAM

17. (SBU) We took the time to meet with GRC and civil society contacts and to consult with diplomatic colleagues before deciding that the best way to advance USG objectives for democratization was to avoid lending our credibility to ELECAM. The GRC has yet to react, but we are hopeful they received our message: Biya may decide to shape Cameroon,s sovereign institutions at his whim, but the USG reserves its discretion to withhold its support from initiatives that are clearly not congruent with Cameroon,s ambitions for democratization. For the moment, we intend to look beyond ELECAM and the broken promises of the current context to focus our efforts on cultivating the next generation of Cameroon,s leaders by engaging with promising organizations and individuals, especially outside the government. We will nonetheless watch ELECAM, hoping ELECAM,s leadership will strive to gain through action the credibility that has thus far eluded them. END COMMENT.

18. (SBU) BEGIN AMEMBASSY YAOUNDE TALKING POINTS ON ELECAM:

-- The Embassy of the United States was not present at the installation ceremony for the members of ELECAM.

-- ELECAM, as currently constituted, is not a step forward for democratization in Cameroon. We chose not to attend the installation ceremony because we believe our time and energy is best spent in partnership with those who are advancing democratization in Cameroon, and we continue to have serious concerns about the makeup and perceived independence of ELECAM.

-- We are disappointed that, given the amount of time taken by the government to appoint its members, the composition of ELECAM is not more broadly representative of Cameroonian society.

-- To successfully discharge its duties, ELECAM must be viewed as reasonably credible and independent by the broad spectrum of Cameroonian society.

-- We note that ELECAM's leadership is not viewed by many Cameroonians outside of the government or ruling party as credible or independent, which raises concerns about whether ELECAM will have the public credibility needed to fulfill its mandate.

-- A credibly independent election agency, as was promised to the international community and the Cameroonian people, is critical to ensure that future elections in Cameroon are viewed as free and fair.

-- ELECAM has been appointed and installed despite the concerns of many within Cameroon and the international community. The burden now falls squarely upon ELECAM to take clear and decisive steps to demonstrate to Cameroonians that it is capable of acting with independence and credibility in organizing free, fair and transparent elections. Failure to do so will call into question any election organized by ELECAM and will further undermine the confidence of Cameroonians and the international community in their results. This would mark yet another missed opportunity to advance democracy in Cameroon.

-- We have expressed these concerns directly to the

YAOUNDE 00000111 003 OF 003

government of Cameroon, and they were aware we would not attend today's ceremony.
GARVEY